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## **Friends of the Earth as a Policy Entrepreneur:**

### **‘The Big Ask’ Campaign for a UK Climate Change Act**

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#### **Abstract**

Friends of the Earth’s (FoE) ‘Big Ask’ campaign played a critical role establishing the path-breaking UK *Climate Change Act (CCA) 2008*. FoE exploited the window of opportunity that opened in climate politics during 2006, first to win cross-party support for the Bill and then to strengthen its content. It then rolled-out the ‘The Big Ask’ across Europe, helped by an innovative collaborative seminar programme with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Multiple Streams Framework is used to identify FoE as an effective policy entrepreneur shaping the agenda-setting process. This contributes to the policy entrepreneurship literature where there are relatively few examples of effective collective entrepreneurship by environmental NGOs, and makes an original empirical contribution through a detailed analytical narrative about a remarkably successful ENGO campaign. Qualitative methodology is employed, drawing on public and private documentary sources and interviews with key campaigners, politicians and officials involved in climate policymaking.

**Keywords:** Climate Change Act; climate policy; The Big Ask; Friends of the Earth; policy entrepreneur; Multiple Streams Framework

Friends of the Earth's (FoE) campaign, 'The Big Ask', calling for a climate change law was one of the most successful recent campaigns by a UK environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO). 'The Big Ask' was officially launched in May 2005 and within 18 months the Labour Government had announced plans for far-reaching climate change legislation. When announcing the proposed legislation, the Secretary of State for the Environment, David Miliband, explicitly acknowledged that 'Friends of the Earth have played a big role in pressing the case for action on climate change. Today's Bill is a big step forward in tackling climate change and we will work with them and many others to make sure it works.' (Friends of the Earth 2006). Two more years of campaigning to strengthen the original Bill followed before the *Climate Change Act (CCA) 2008* became law. Thus 'The Big Ask' contributed to the introduction of legislation that, by enshrining ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets in law, backed by innovative five-year carbon budgets and an independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), represented not just a radical transformation of UK climate policy, but was seen globally as a path-breaking piece of legislation since used by several countries as a model for their own legislation.

Although 'The Big Ask' has been examined in passing in the wider context of UK climate and energy policy (Rutter et al 2012; Lockwood 2013; Carter and Jacobs 2014; Lorenzoni and Benson 2014) there has been only limited analysis of the campaign itself.<sup>1</sup> Here, we provide a detailed examination of the campaign, including the first account of the effort by FoE's sister groups to roll out 'The Big Ask' across Europe, encompassing a collaborative seminar programme with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It examines why the campaign was successful in achieving its primary aim of a strong Climate Change Act and why the ambitious aim of rolling-out 'The Big Ask' across Europe proved challenging, whilst also analysing why FoE was unable to build on the momentum generated by the successful climate campaign. A conceptual approach based on the public policy agenda-setting literature is used, specifically Kingdon's (1995) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), which is used to identify the critical policy entrepreneurial role played by FoE in coupling the problem, politics and policy windows to make radical policy change possible. We thus contribute to the burgeoning literature on policy entrepreneurship where there are surprisingly few examples of successful

collective entrepreneurship by NGOs; specifically, rather than focus on the entrepreneurial activities of canny individuals, we show how FoE as an organisation played a key entrepreneurial role. In so doing, we also make an important empirical contribution by providing a detailed analytical narrative about a remarkably successful ENGO campaign. In the unstable political environment surrounding Brexit, with the UK's green lobby mobilising to defend existing environmental protection laws, policies and institutions, it is particularly timely to reflect on the factors that contributed to the success of 'The Big Ask'.

The next section outlines the Multiple Streams Framework, which is then used in the following sections to explain the context in which FoE conceived of 'The Big Ask', to frame the account of 'The Big Ask' campaign, and then to analysis the factors shaping the success of the campaign. The study employs a qualitative methodology using public documentary sources, internal FoE reports on the campaign, interviews with members of FoE campaign team<sup>2</sup> and material from a wider set of around 20 interviews with key actors closely involved in climate policymaking circles during the period 2006-2008.

### **Achieving policy change**

ENGOS have limited capacity to exercise influence over the policy agenda: as relatively weak actors in the environmental policy arena they are usually in the position of reacting to events rather than shaping them. They often appear to be at the mercy of 'issue attention cycles' (Downs 1972) when public and media interest latches briefly onto one issue before lurching off in pursuit of another. Downs argued that these temporary cycles of public fascination with an issue produced little long-lasting policy impact, but others claim that the establishment of new institutions, programmes and policies often coincides with what Downs calls the 'alarmed discovery' of the issue by the public, at the peak of the attention cycle (Peters and Hogwood 1985). The challenge for ENGOS is to exploit these intermittent cycles of interest by shaping the policy agenda in order to deliver measures that continue to function long after attention to the issue has moved on elsewhere (Peters and Hogwood 1985, Baumgartner and Jones 2009).

One major contribution in the agenda-setting literature that tries to explain how and when significant policy change will occur is the Multiple Streams Framework developed by John Kingdon (1995). This dynamic model of the policy process identifies three independent streams: problems, policies, politics. The *problem* stream concerns public matters that require attention, although they may or may not be identified as important. The *policy* stream includes proposals for change that are claimed to solve the problems identified in the problem stream. The *politics* stream encompasses those processes – public opinion, election results, pressure group activity – that help shape how politicians, the media and other opinion-formers perceive public problems and view potential solutions. Kingdon argues that these streams operate independently, but there are moments when compelling problems or political events open up ‘policy windows’ – opportunities for policy advocates to push their pet solutions to a particular problem. Here Kingdon identifies a key role for ‘policy entrepreneurs’ who ‘couple’ the streams together: ‘they hook solutions to problems, proposals to political momentum, and political events to policy problems....Without the presence of an entrepreneur, the linking of the streams may not take place’ (Kingdon 1995, p.182). Kingdon’s broad definition of policy entrepreneurs as being ‘in or out of government, in elected or appointed positions, in interest groups or research organizations’ (Kingdon 1995, p.122) certainly encompasses an ENGO such as FoE. Yet, strangely, the literature on policy entrepreneurship, which has been profoundly influenced by Kingdon’s work, contains relatively few examples of ENGOs.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the policy entrepreneurship literature tends to study individual entrepreneurs rather than organisations operating collectively in an entrepreneurial way. Here, we argue that FoE as an organisation (rather than any key individual within it) successfully played the role of policy entrepreneur through ‘The Big Ask’ campaign by providing a policy solution and helping couple the three streams together.

### **Context for ‘The Big Ask’: Complacent Climate Policy**

When FoE conceived the idea of ‘The Big Ask’ in 2004, climate change was not a major issue in UK politics, although the issue was attracting growing attention.<sup>4</sup> In MSF terms, within the

*problem stream* the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2001) had presented new and stronger evidence of a close link between increased global temperatures and human activities. In 2004 the government's Chief Scientific Advisor, David King, observed that the science now indicated that a global emissions stabilization target of 450ppm CO<sub>2</sub> only was probably necessary, suggesting that the existing Government targets based on a 550ppm CO<sub>2</sub> only target were inadequate (King personal interview, February 2013). Yet, it was increasingly apparent that the Government was struggling to achieve its existing modest targets, especially as, after a decade of decline, GHG emissions had levelled out. Although the UK was on course to meet its Kyoto Protocol commitment of reducing GHGs by at least 12.5% below the 1990 baseline over the period 2008-2012, it seemed likely to miss the Labour Government's tougher 2010 domestic targets of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 20% below baseline and for 10% of electricity to be generated from renewable sources (ENDS Report 2004, No.359).

Yet little was happening within the *policy stream*. The UK had achieved impressive reductions in GHG emissions during the 1990s as an unintended consequence of the Conservative government's liberalisation of the electricity sector, which led to a 'dash for gas' that saw gas-fired plants replace coal-fired power stations. This success probably contributed to a degree of complacency within the Labour government, even though the RCEP had in 2000 identified 'something of a hole in the government's climate change programme' (RCEP 2000, p.80) and called for a tougher target of a 60% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050. The government eventually adopted this higher target in 2003, and introduced measures such as the Climate Change Levy imposed on business energy use and a Renewables Obligation to encourage renewable energy, although their impact was limited by actions that would increase emissions such as an effective freeze on petrol duty and support for the expansion of the aviation industry. In short, despite struggling to meet its own emission reduction targets, the Labour government showed little interest in significantly strengthening domestic climate policy.

Within the *politics stream* the obvious general explanation for this complacency was the low salience of environmental issues. Furthermore, two recent events had made the Labour leadership extremely cautious about adopting progressive climate policies. First, when the

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, proposed a new Climate Change Levy in 1999 he was subjected to an extremely hostile, well-organized business lobby demanding that his proposals be watered down, a bruising experience for someone keen to be regarded as business-friendly. Soon after, protests about fuel prices led by hauliers and farmers dried up petrol pumps in September 2000, brought the country to a virtual standstill, and caused panic within the government (Blair 2010, p.291-297). Yet the Labour government came under no political pressure from the Conservatives to be tougher on climate change; indeed, under William Hague's leadership they supported the fuel protesters, promised to abolish the Climate Change Levy and generally showed little interest in the issue.

However, in 2004 things began to stir. David King attracted huge publicity for his claim in a *Science* article that climate change posed a more serious threat to the world than terrorism (King 2004). Blair, in a speech in September, urged business leaders to take action on climate change, which he announced would be high on the agenda at the July 2005 G8 conference at Gleneagles and a priority during the UK's Presidency of the EU in 2005 (Blair 2004). These events would be preceded in February 2005 by a scientific conference in Exeter on 'Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change', sponsored by DEFRA.

This discussion of the three streams sets the context in which FoE decided to launch 'The Big Ask' campaign. To summarize, although there was little activity in the *policy* stream or any real sense of urgency in policy circles to act on climate change, there was sufficient instability and movement in the *problem* and *politics* streams to suggest that a window of opportunity for policy change might emerge soon.

### **The Big Idea**

The idea of a Climate Change Bill was initiated by Friends of the Earth through 'The Big Ask' campaign. The idea emerged in an ad-hoc conversation in late 2004 in a stairwell in the FoE offices in London between Bryony Worthington (then FoE climate campaigner) and Martyn Williams (then FoE parliamentary campaigner). The backdrop was the worsening problem of climate change and the inadequacy of the Government's policy response. As Worthington recalls:

I worked on the UK's climate strategies - they'd had a few by then - and they were pretty woeful. I was into the numbers of climate change so I was tracking the annual emissions and saw that there was just no trend any more, whereas they'd been falling steadily in the 1990s, from 1997 onwards it started to just bounce around and there was no discernible trend down, and yet we had these glossy strategies that were supposed to be doing something about it. So I just got very frustrated and said we've got to change the way we do this. (Worthington, interview, 21 March 2012).

The innovative idea that emerged as the basis of 'The Big Ask' was the notion of the legally binding carbon budget:

I had this idea that we needed to adopt what Kyoto is, which is a carbon budget, for five years, and instead of having a target that we were trying to hit ten years further forward, we would have a trajectory that we were trying to manage emissions around, so that the area under the curve was actually counted. Because what annoyed me was we had this 2010 target of a 20% reduction and there was no way we were going to hit it, but it was also pointless if we did, because you could take a really wiggly path to it and then say 'we made it' and then the emissions could start rising again. So it's a really bad way of setting policy - those point in time targets - trajectories are much better. What I wanted was, essentially, nine or ten budgets set out all the way to 2050 that would give us a clear pathway. (Worthington, interview, 21 March 2012)

Having identified the *problem*, FoE was aware that *political* interest in climate change was increasing, particularly rapidly after Blair's September 2004 speech to business leaders and his decision to prioritise it at the G8 Presidency and during the UK's EU Presidency. Climate change was moving centre-stage. Tony Juniper, FoE Director, recalled that before Blair's speech:

It was seen as an environmental issue... it led to it moving from page 7 environment correspondent, to page 1 political correspondent. I think that then opened a whole load of possibilities that weren't there before, including opening the space for real political activism. (quoted in Rutter et al 2012, p.114).



Worthington aired many of her ideas as lead author of FoE's official response to the Government's ongoing climate change programme review (Friends of the Earth 2005a). This submission criticized the bottom-up approach of the climate change programme whereby the projected emissions reductions arising from a disparate collection of policies were simply added together. Instead, Worthington made the case for a top-down approach, setting overall targets and then working out policies to reach the targets. Michael Jacobs, then special adviser to the Chancellor on environmental issues, observed 'The climate change programme review... published in spring 2006 [H.M. Government 2006] was a disastrous exercise in how not to do this effectively. The big insight from the [FoE] report was that you had to do it top down.' (quoted in Rutter et al 2012, p.116).

The specific *policy* proposal that FoE came up with was a legal requirement to cut the UK's total carbon dioxide emissions by at least 3% every year ([www.thebigask.com](http://www.thebigask.com)), which FoE believed was 'doable'. The idea evolved to encompass year on year cuts - to ensure cumulative emissions reductions and to prevent politicians delaying action while holding out for a magic bullet to arrive that will dramatically reduce emissions – backed by annual targets, which require annual reports and therefore increased scrutiny. It was a deliberate strategic choice by FoE campaigners not to say how the targets should be met; specifically, to avoid a political row that might distract from the campaign, FoE did not reject nuclear power. In early 2005 Williams produced a two-page draft Bill to outline what was required (year on year cuts, annual reports to parliament, financial penalties on Minister's wages if repeated failure). It was written as though it were an actual Bill, like a Private Member's Bill, although FoE campaigners knew that it would need to be a government bill given the scale and implications of the proposal. The campaign strategy underpinning 'The Big Ask' was simple: to put pressure on individual MPs, primarily through constituency pressure, to persuade those MPs in turn to push their party leadership to adopt a Climate Change Bill.

Thus FoE had identified developments in the *problem* and *politics* streams that suggested the potential for change, and provided a simple and realistic policy solution. But it was as yet far from clear that a genuine window of opportunity would open, and if it did, who or what would prise it open.

## The Campaign

In February 2005 FoE met other ENGOs to seek support for the idea and the campaign. WWF and RSPB took a 'wait and see' position; Greenpeace rejected the idea (although later it supported it). So FoE decided to proceed alone: *'We had a long conversation at FoE about whether we should be prioritising our effort on climate change... so we closed down a lot of our other campaigns to run "The Big Ask"'* (Juniper, quoted in Rutter et al 2012, p.114). A small team of personally committed, experienced staff was formed to drive the campaign forwards: Mike Childs, Martyn Williams, Bryony Worthington, Bastien Hibon, Anna Mitchell (media) and David Babbs (activism), although many more across the organization contributed huge amounts through the campaign. The look of the campaign was devised internally by Creative Director Bastien Hibon, but FoE received pro-bono support from the CHI advertising agency, which came up with the idea of calling the campaign 'The Big Ask'. However, to secure this internal organisational agreement to focus resources on 'The Big Ask', it was politically necessary to develop a broader strategy identifying how other FoE climate activities (e.g. in transport and aviation) could support the campaign by underlining the need for a climate bill, even though in practice they were not needed.

On 7 April 2005, one month before the general election, the draft Bill (Presentation Bill) was jointly introduced into Parliament by three relatively high-profile backbench members of the political parties, including two former ministers: Michael Meacher, former Labour Environment Minister; John Gummer, former Conservative Environment Secretary of State; and Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat environment spokesperson, thereby demonstrating cross-party support. Soon after the Labour government's re-election, FoE launched 'The Big Ask' climate campaign on 25 May 2005, with Radiohead front man, Thom Yorke, calling for the introduction of a climate change law committing the UK to cut emissions annually by 3%; a cinema advertisement; and an opinion poll reporting that 73% of the public thought that the government wasn't doing enough to tackle climate change (Friends of the Earth 2005b). A parliamentary petition (Early Day Motion [EDM] 178) was put down calling for new legislation.<sup>5</sup>

In a Channel 4 interview with Thom Yorke and Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, Beckett rejected the need for a new law.

On 13 July 2005, five days after the Gleneagles G8 summit, which had failed to deliver an agreement on climate change, a coalition of groups (including Help the Aged and Christian Aid, WWF) and MPs, coordinated by FoE, publicised details of the proposed legislation to MPs and journalists. Over 200 MPs had already signed EDM 178. On 29 July, a coalition of energy companies and ENGOs wrote to the Prime Minister demanding action on climate change; specifically they called for annual reduction targets to give businesses the certainty necessary to invest in low carbon technologies. Meanwhile, FoE's volunteer local groups organised a series of events and activities to raise awareness and support for 'The Big Ask' amongst the general public and MPs. Creative communications, including videos, gigs, attending festivals and celebrity involvement were a feature throughout the campaign and helped make it 'aspirational'. The Cooperative Bank agreed to partner FoE in the campaign, financing a major report, helping fund the communications strategy and encouraging its customers to support the campaign. Wider mobilization was also encouraged by FoE's involvement in Stop Climate Chaos (SCC), a coalition of over 100 environmental, transport, development, faith, women's groups and trade unions, launched in September to campaign for policies aimed at limiting temperature increases to 2<sup>0</sup>C above pre-industrial levels.

FoE proved effective at exploiting events to publicise the campaign. Thus, in November 2006 it publicised the leaked draft of the Government's new climate change strategy, which was widely regarded as inadequate, to generate increased support for their campaign. Similarly, when the revised Climate Change Programme (H.M. Government 2006) was eventually published in March, FoE emphasised the reiterated prediction that the target of a 20% cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010 would not be met.

Meanwhile, in December 2005 David Cameron was elected as leader of the Conservative Party, which proved highly significant for the campaign. Cameron embraced the environment as a central component of his strategy to modernize the party and 'detoxify' the 'nasty' image of the Conservatives (Bale 2010, Carter and Clements 2015). He swiftly identified

the flawed Climate Change Programme as ammunition with which to attack the government. Almost immediately Gordon Brown invited a group of ENGO representatives to a meeting in Downing Street on 20 December (interviews). The Chancellor's prime ministerial ambitions obliged him to respond to Cameron's green agenda, starting by improving relations with the ENGOs (which had been poor for several years because Brown felt let down by the lack of support they had given him over his Climate Change Levy). Brown encouraged the ENGOs to suggest policy ideas and to emulate the Jubilee 2000 / Make Poverty History campaign by mobilising the public in support of action on climate change, thereby making it politically easier for the government to act.

Brown's advice was heeded. On 1 March 2006, the SCC coalition hosted a 'Carbon Speed Dating' event in Westminster where 70 MPs were lobbied by their constituents. The event was attended by Cameron, Beckett and Liberal Democrat leader, Menzies Campbell. In May, Radiohead's Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood played 'The Big Ask' concert in London, which was attended by Cameron and soon-to-be Environment Secretary, David Miliband. By now 100,000 people had sent postcards requesting their MP to support a strong Climate Change Bill and some 300 MPs had signed EDM 178 (it seemed that around 200 postcards was sufficient to persuade an individual MP to sign the EDM, so FoE local groups campaigned across local constituencies to ensure as many MPs as possible received a large tranche of postcards).

Another hugely significant political development saw David Miliband appointed Secretary of State for the Environment. Miliband was at that time a potential rival to Brown to succeed Blair as Labour leader: 'a man on a mission', as one DEFRA official observed, 'who was very keen to get things done and done quickly' (Worthington, interview, 21 March 2012). Miliband was keen to take the initiative on climate change, but, initially, he was not supportive of a climate bill and his advisers were sceptical that this was the right option (Rutter et al 2012). He toyed with the idea of personal carbon budgets, floating it in a speech to the Audit Commission in July 2006 (Miliband 2006). However, aware that momentum was building behind the climate bill he asked his special advisor, Tony Grayling, to write a policy brief explicitly on the FoE legislative proposal and its component parts (Grayling, interview, April 2011).

Perhaps the most significant development of the entire 'Big Ask' campaign occurred on 1 September 2006 when Conservative leader David Cameron shared a platform with FoE director Tony Juniper to call for a climate bill. Chris Huhne, Liberal Democrat environment spokesperson, declared his support on the same day. By now 380 MPs had backed 'The Big Ask' by signing EDM 178. FoE launched another big push to persuade remaining MPs to sign EDM 178 and to write to the Prime Minister calling for a climate change law. Over the coming weeks almost every MP (620 out of 646 MPs) was lobbied personally by constituents backing the campaign. On 15 September Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research report, commissioned by FoE and the Co-operative Bank, warned that the Government had only four years to implement a major new programme of action to cut carbon emissions if the UK was to play its part in keeping global temperatures below danger levels (Bows et al 2006). The report was the lead item on the BBC1 10 p.m. News and BBC2's Newsnight. During this period, with ministers constantly asked by the media whether they would introduce a climate bill, David Miliband was heard privately to say, that 'We cannot be seen to be the only party not supporting this idea' (Rutter et al 2012, p.115; several interviews). Eventually, within six weeks of Cameron signing up to 'The Big Ask', Miliband announced in Parliament that the government would introduce legislation to tackle climate change, although he remained non-committal on its precise format (*The Guardian*, 13 October 2006).

With the Queen's Speech looming, FoE stepped up the pressure on the government to include a climate bill in its legislative programme. David Cameron published a model climate bill for the government to adopt; like FoE's it included annual targets, but it added an independent Committee on Climate Change (*The Guardian*, 25 October 2006). The publication of the Stern report on 30 October, warning of the potentially huge impact of climate change on economic growth, added a powerful economic discourse alongside the scientific arguments in demanding swift and radical action. Over 25,000 people attended a SCC event in Trafalgar Square on 4 November, the largest ever UK climate change event. Some 130,000 people had now asked their MP to support 'The Big Ask'. A remarkable 412 MPs backed a strong Bill, which was the fifth highest total for an EDM since 1939 (HOC 2010), representing 64% of all MPs and a

majority in every party in Parliament. Finally, the government announced the introduction of a Climate Change Bill in the Queen's Speech on 15 November.

### **The Campaign Continues: Strengthening the Bill**

The government published its draft climate change bill on 13 March 2007. FoE welcomed the Bill but demanded that it be strengthened significantly, calling for a more stringent reduction target of 80% by 2050 (a demand endorsed by other leading ENGOs), the inclusion of aviation and shipping emissions, and year on year targets. FoE campaigning continued to focus on pressurising MPs. In July, actors Jude Law and Helen Baxendale, with other celebrities, helped launch 'The Big Ask Online March', which enabled people to send a video message about climate change direct to their MP. By now more than 170,000 people had backed 'The Big Ask', mostly by sending postcards. Two months later FoE launched 'The Big Ask - Big Push.' Groups and supporters organised events and activities across the country to highlight the need for a stronger Bill, including individual lobbies of MPs.

The *Climate Change Act* eventually included the first two FoE demands, although it took a concerted effort by campaigners and MPs of all parties to ensure that it did. The Government was slow to shift position. In September 2007, Gordon Brown, now Prime Minister, asked the new independent Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to report on whether the 60% reduction by 2050 target should be strengthened. The following month the new Environment Secretary, Hilary Benn, also asked the CCC to see if the bill should cover emissions from international aviation and shipping. But with little discernible progress, in June 2008 over 80 Labour MPs called for a tougher bill that contained the 80% target and included aviation and shipping emissions. Eventually, following the recommendations of the CCC, Ed Miliband, Secretary of State at the new Department for Energy and Climate Change, announced in October 2006 that the Bill would contain the tougher 80% emission reduction target and include aviation and shipping emissions.

FoE was less successful in achieving its aim of annual targets. Tony Juniper had welcomed the inclusion of a climate bill in the Queen's Speech by describing it as 'a crucial first

step in ensuring the UK plays its part in keeping temperatures below danger levels. The next step is to ensure the bill delivers the cuts that are needed through the introduction of annual targets for reducing the UK's carbon dioxide emissions.' (*BBC News*, 15 November 2006). FoE saw annual targets as a way of stopping governments from simply blaming their predecessors for lack of action, which is a weakness for budget periods longer than, or cutting across, a government's term of office. This focus on persuading the government to accept annual targets had become increasingly important to FoE. Yet David Miliband had declared these to be 'silly' (*The Guardian*, 14 November 2006) because they put the government too much at the mercy of short-term uncontrollable events, such as a cold winter increasing fuel consumption (although FoE argued these could be accounted for within the annual report). The Prime Minister repeated these objections to annual targets in an online debate with Juniper (*BBC News*, 22 November 2006). Significantly, Bryony Worthington, who had been recruited by David Miliband to work as part of the drafting team in government, also regarded the FoE emphasis on annual targets as a distraction that missed the original key campaign objective to deliver a steady downward trajectory in emissions (Worthington, interview, 21 March 2012). Although the Government promised to set an indicative annual range of emissions within each five year carbon budget to act as yardsticks, it refused to accept statutory annual targets.

On 28 October 2008, 463 MPs, including a large majority across all parties, voted in favour of a *Climate Change Act* (with just three against) that had been significantly strengthened since the original bill.

### **Rolling out 'The Big Ask' across Europe**

The publication of the Parliamentary bill coincided with the decision by the European Council in March 2007 to commit the EU to ambitious climate and energy targets for 2020 – the so-called '20-20-20' targets (European Commission 2015). Thus, the UK's decision to adopt the CCA attracted widespread interest from other member states. Mike Childs, as Chair of the Executive Committee of FoE Europe, began working with national FoE groups across Europe wanting to run campaigns for their own CCAs. The European leg of 'The Big Ask' campaign was launched on

27 February 2008 at an event involving Thom Yorke in Brussels. FoE groups in seven European countries began lobbying their own governments to introduce climate change legislation.

FoE England and Wales sought to support its sister groups across Europe. In particular, in an unprecedented development, it helped publicise the CCA across Europe through a series of jointly organized seminars, funded by the FCO and the European Climate Foundation. Mike Childs approached the FCO indirectly with the idea, and received a very positive response. Significantly, with David Miliband now Foreign Secretary, the FCO had identified climate change as a foreign policy priority because of its role in energy security, the potential economic opportunities it offered UK businesses and the scope to use the concept of carbon budgets to engage with overseas finance and economic ministries. The FCO had carried out a GAP Analysis that had identified only very patchy support across Europe from governments, business and the public for action on climate change. The UK's experience with the CCA had demonstrated the importance of securing cross-party support for proactive climate policy. The FCO saw the seminar series as a way of encouraging governments to consider climate change legislation, getting businesses to recognize the benefits of a transition to a low carbon economy and the potential benefits of securing first mover advantage in this field, and to encourage a groundswell of activity pushing in that direction from civil society. The seminars, backed by a joint FCO/FoE video, sought to explain the key features of the CCA and demonstrate the existence of a broad coalition of interests that supported it, whilst showcasing the UK's commitment to action on GHGs.

Through 2009-2010 there were seminars involving FoE in Budapest, Berlin, Madrid, Dublin, Warsaw, Helsinki, Vienna, Prague and Riga; meanwhile, the FCO organised events with different civil society representation in Mexico, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia. The panel of speakers typically consisted of a senior DECC official, a minister or senior advisor, a business representative and a FoE spokesperson. This UK input was matched by a panel from the host country with similar representation to provide local context and to stimulate debate. These half/full day seminars typically attracted 60-80 participants encompassing ministers, government officials, business chief executives, foreign ambassadors, high-profile journalists and leading NGOs from both the environment and development movements. From the FCO's



perspective these seminars were a low-budget strand of its wider climate diplomacy strategy. The FCO did not expect to secure immediate legislative changes, but measured by local media attention, the good mix of participants and sometimes substantive follow-up involving the FCO providing advice and support in drafting legislation, the programme was judged to be successful.

However, FoE's efforts to promote climate legislation encountered strong resistance in the wake of the economic and financial crisis that swept across Europe and pushed climate down the agenda. It also proved difficult to mount similar individual MP-focused campaigns in countries with electoral systems based around party lists. Even initially-promising campaigns struggled. In Hungary, for example, the FCO/FoE seminar contributed to the development of a draft climate bill that attracted the support of over 400 civil society groups and the Parliamentary Environment Committee but, facing strong opposition from the fossil fuel lobby, the ruling socialist government pulled the bill just before the April 2010 general election (Justice and Environment 2011, p.5). The election of the rightwing Fidesz government ended any prospect of climate change legislation. Elsewhere, there were active FoE campaigns in several countries, although FoE groups were much smaller and had fewer resources than their UK counterpart. Eventually, climate change legislation of varying strengths was passed in Austria (2011), Denmark (2014), Finland (2015), Ireland (2015), Sweden (2017), with legislation promised in Norway; the influence of domestic campaigns over these legislative initiatives is beyond our remit here.

### **Coupling the streams together**

The CCA represented a radical transformation in the UK's approach to climate change. As Carter and Jacobs (2014) have argued, this change came about because developments in the climate change *problem* and *politics* streams combined to open a window of opportunity for radical *policy* change. As they demonstrate, 'The Big Ask' was only one factor in this process; the rapid emergence of climate change as a compelling *problem* reflected a combination of strengthening science, high-profile focusing events (the G8 summit, the release of Al Gore's film *An*

*Inconvenient Truth*, the publication of the Stern Report), escalating media coverage of climate change, and worsening UK emission trends. Meanwhile, significant developments in the *politics* stream – notably, rising public concern, ENGO campaigning, Cameron’s election as Conservative leader with a progressive green agenda, the appointment of David Miliband as Environment Secretary, increasing pressure from the business community – combined to ratchet up pressure for government action on climate change. However, as the window of opportunity for change opened in the problem and politics streams, Friends of the Earth made a radical *policy* solution, the Climate Change Bill, available to policymakers (see also Lorenzoni and Benson 2014).

The above account of ‘The Big Ask’ demonstrates that FoE’s influence was profound because it contributed to the growing pressure for change in all three streams and, crucially, it played an effective policy entrepreneurial role by coupling the three streams together. Within the problem stream, Bryony Worthington’s identification of the Government’s failure to deliver emission reduction targets and her presentation of a radically different approach to climate policy in FoE’s submission to the climate change programme review (FoE 2005a) played a critical role in focusing the attention of policy elites on the need to improve UK climate policy. FoE then provided a simple but radical solution: a climate change bill with statutory targets, carbon budgets and annual emissions reductions. By targeting MPs across all parties through an ‘aspirational’ campaign, FoE was able to stimulate bottom-up pressure within the three major parties. But the real political coup was to persuade David Cameron to support the bill. FoE utilised its good relationships with ‘green thinkers’ across all parties and pursued an insider strategy to influence people close to Cameron. The Labour government, under growing pressure from the media and public opinion to act on climate change, and facing opposition parties unified in demanding a bill, quickly caved in. What emerged was an unprecedented cross-party ‘competitive consensus’ involving all three major parties trying to ‘out-green’ each other on climate change and the environment, a window that remained open for several years (Carter and Jacobs 2014, p.137). Subsequently, FoE worked closely with cross-party MPs and the wider ENGO movement to maintain pressure on the government to strengthen the bill considerably as it passed through Parliament, notably by embracing FoE’s demands for tougher reduction targets and the inclusion of shipping and aviation emissions.

Although it is very difficult to ‘measure’ the exact amount of influence any individual actor exercises over a decision, people closely involved in policymaking at the time certainly identified FoE’s role as critical. As noted above, David Miliband publicly acknowledged FoE’s role on the day of the Queen’s Speech; a view later confirmed privately by his special advisor (Grayling, interview, April 2011). An Institute for Government (Rutter et al 2012) policy reunion seminar attended by many of the key actors endorsed this viewpoint. The BBC’s political editor, Nick Robinson, saw the part played by FoE as a major newsworthy aspect of the Queen’s Speech:

People often say ‘does anything change politics?’ Well it has here. Friends of the Earth did a rising campaign for a Climate Change Bill. Ministers pooh-poohed the idea. What is the point of a Bill they said? It wouldn’t be worth the paper it is written on. Then David Cameron adopted it as his key theme. Menzies Campbell’s first big policy announcement was on green taxes and Ministers have gradually said ‘Oh, let’s have a Bill’.” (BBC News 15 November 2006)

Academic studies of the period support these assessments (Lockwood 2013, Carter and Jacobs 2014, Lorenzoni and Benson 2014).

When considering the reasons for the success of this campaign, it is important to note that in several respects ‘The Big Ask’ was not particularly innovative. It was an established Westminster-focused approach that built on the experiences of previous FoE campaigns supporting legislation on Home Energy Conservation, Road Traffic Reduction and Warm Homes and Energy Conservation. These campaigns were much less successful, but they provided significant lessons: specifically, the design of the proposed Climate Change Bill was based on annual targets (rather than a single 15-year target) and its objective was a Government Bill rather than a Private Member’s Bill (Martin Williams, personal correspondence, 16 June 2016). The emphasis on constituency-based campaigning to pressure MPs to support the Bill was well established, so the procedures were in place to implement it and the local activists were familiar with the approach.

What was new for FoE was the scale of the operation: rather than running a suite of campaigns of varying sizes, 'The Big Ask' became *the* focus of attention within the national organization. As 'The Big Ask' gathered momentum, it rapidly absorbed almost all the available FoE campaigning resources, nationally and locally. Campaign organizers were surprised at the speed of progress. The original internal objectives agreed in late 2004 targetted 15,000 people to be signed up by the end of 2007 and the passage of a strong climate bill by 2010. Yet, by the end of 2005 the campaign team was sufficiently confident to revise these targets dramatically to 40,000 people signed up by the end of 2006 and the introduction of a strong bill by 2007. These revised objectives were all met. The involvement of so many people, especially 'new' activists, in the campaign was a major achievement. The number of local FoE groups increased during the period from about 185 to around 224.

A second distinctive feature was the widespread use of celebrities. Most notably, Thom Yorke's involvement generated great enthusiasm from the FoE communications team as they recognised they had a valuable asset for mobilising grassroots activism, especially amongst younger supporters (Nulman 2015, p.122). His presence attracted other celebrities later in the campaign, especially during the passage of the Bill through Parliament, including the band Razorlight and actors Gillian Anderson, Stephen Fry and Helen Baxendale. The combination of gigs, interviews and celebrity endorsements throughout the campaign provided an aspirational feel and helped promote the 'Big Ask' slogan.

Not every campaign demand was achieved and not every component of the campaign worked well. For example, the relationship between 'The Big Ask' and the SCC was rather ambivalent. There was clearly an element of turf war, with FoE keen to protect what it saw as its innovative idea and campaign, while SCC was split over its support for 'The Big Ask' and more generally struggled to identify its role. Nevertheless, a year or so into the campaign FoE did start to work more closely with (parts of) the SCC.

More significant, however, was FoE's failure to find an equally attractive follow-up campaign to maintain the momentum generated by 'The Big Ask', mobilizing and retaining its new recruits and local groups. Institutional factors and internal organizational politics played an

important part here. The early decision to concentrate most resources on 'The Big Ask' in a way that proved necessary to sustain the campaign, but would never have been approved internally at the outset, caused some discontent amongst other campaigning teams within the national organization whose own work on, for example, food and farming, was inevitably hampered by this strategy. 'The Big Ask' campaign strategy included several site campaigns, especially on aviation and transport, in an attempt to address these objections. However, in practice, little effort was allocated to these activities because they were a lower priority than the core campaign for a Bill, which ate up the lion's share of resources. Although the success of 'The Big Ask' produced a grudging acceptance amongst internal dissenters that this central focus had to be sustained, the underlying assumption was that resources would eventually flow back to other campaigning issue areas. When FoE debated internally how it should follow up 'The Big Ask', campaigners arguing that the priority should be to help implement the new CCA in specific sectors, such as renewable energy, or at local level, in cities and local authorities, were countered by a demand that the focus should shift on to nature and biodiversity. The strong internal pressure for FoE to return to being a general campaigning ENGO rather than a climate change organization resulted in the decision to run campaigns on tropical rainforests and on the food chain, mixed with a renewed emphasis on smaller campaigns that would engage local activists. Subsequent campaigns on bees and opposing fracking have also tried to move away from using activists simply as 'foot-soldiers' doing little more than lobbying local MPs, to embracing a fuller role. Thus the bee campaign encouraged members to carry out a range of actions in their own gardens and communities, while the campaign against fracking encourages members to target local authorities in an exercise in local empowerment.

It was always going to be difficult for FoE to follow the success of 'The Big Ask', which had benefited from problem and politics windows opening together. Environmental issues rapidly declined in salience in the wake of the financial and economic crisis. But subsequent campaigning strategy was in part shaped by internal organizational politics, perhaps to the detriment of maintaining the positive momentum that had been built up around climate change. Even the decision to drop 'The 'Big Ask' slogan and replace it with 'Let's get serious about climate change' was probably unwise, given the name recognition that the former had

acquired - and the lack of impact of its replacement. Thus FoE struggled with the tensions arising from its high-profile success in one area of its activities, climate change, which challenged its *raison d'être* as a generalist environmental organisation based on participatory member activism.

Finally, when FoE tried to take the campaign further afield it met with less immediate success. In part, this outcome reflected the different circumstances elsewhere, including the generally smaller and weaker sister FoE groups. But it was also a matter of timing as the roll-out was soon followed by the financial and economic crisis. In short, the window of opportunity had closed. Nevertheless, the existence of the CCA has itself led to other groups and institutions promoting the idea of climate change laws across the globe, including WWF, the FCO and the Grantham Institute (2015). Whether or not FoE's campaigning led indirectly to CCAs in those countries that have adopted them is a subject for further research.

## **Conclusion**

'The Big Ask' was an undoubted success. Friends of the Earth was able to exploit the moment in the climate change issue attention cycle (2006-2008) of alarmed (re)discovery when the public, media, business community and policymakers together became exercised by the problem. The application of the multiple streams framework shows how FoE contributed to the opening of this window of opportunity by ratcheting up pressure in the problem and politics streams, and then coupled the three streams together through an innovative policy solution and active lobbying, which resulted in the path-breaking *Climate Change Act 2008*. FoE identified a compelling problem, presented a simple but radical solution, and skillfully exploited the party politics surrounding the Blair/Brown transition, the ascendancy of David Miliband and, crucially, Cameron's Conservative modernization strategy. FoE played the policy entrepreneur role extremely effectively. This timing was certainly partly fortuitous, but FoE was able to seize to the opportunity skilfully and play a critical role in delivering policy change.

The campaign strategy had several strengths. It was focused on a single outcome: securing a climate change bill. The demand for a bill was appealing because it required

government action that did not immediately impose costs on individuals (although the resulting policies required to cut emissions would of course have consequences for individuals and businesses), and it was possible to build Parliamentary support precisely because the measure was detached from claims or demands that could have alienated potential supporters (for example, by rejecting nuclear power). The campaign focus on lobbying individual MPs neatly combined FoE's traditional capacity for mobilizing its grassroots activists and the wider public with a more traditional insider strategy carried out to great effect by parliamentary lobbyists working at the centre. An impressive range of campaigning techniques, including celebrities, gigs, videos and commissioned reports was employed. As a senior official from another ENGO commented at the time: 'It's done their positioning a world of good. Put them closer to policymaking. The fact that they captured part of the Tory Party to promote it was impressive. Unlikely bedfellows – shows professionalism and optimism ... it made them look more like players than shouters' (FoE internal report). This comment has contemporary resonance for FoE and its fellow major ENGOs who have launched the 'Greener UK' campaign to defend and promote environmental protection in a context where Brexit means that UK environmental and climate change policy is facing huge uncertainty and instability. It is an opportune moment for ENGOs to reflect on past experience about the importance of problem framing, offering realistic policy solutions, and building cross-party consensus.

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## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> For an exception, see Nulman (2015).

<sup>2</sup> One of the authors of this article, Mike Childs, was one of the campaign organisers and we draw on his knowledge of events.

<sup>3</sup> One recent example is Mintrom and Luetjens (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Both Carter and Jacobs (2014) and Lorenzoni and Benson (2014) also apply the MSF in their wider analyses of the CCA.

<sup>5</sup> An EDM is a mechanism used by MPs to draw attention to an issue or event.

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